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ABSTRACT

This report presents the results of a survey of Rhode Island school administrators (n=523) and open-ended interviews of administrators (n=28) that would provide information for the design of leadership and staff development activities as part of Rhode Island's LEAD project--an attempt to improve the leadership capacity of school administrators. Superintendents, assistant superintendents, principals, and assistant principals composed the samples. The survey included, but was not limited to, the following variables: school district size, grade levels served, student socioeconomic status, the number of gifted students, the number of special education students, race of administrators, sex of administrators, and the highest degrees earned by administrators. Using a five-point scale to describe the degree of importance and challenge to the roles that superintendents, assistant superintendents, principals, and assistant principals play, tables 1, 2, 3, and 4 in appendix A present survey results. The data revealed that the degree of administrators' decision-making authority, intercommunication, and willingness to update their knowledge about educational issues may depend on, but is not limited to, establishing an orderly and peaceful school district climate and having high expectations for teachers and students. (JAM)

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Professional Development for Rhode Island School Administrators

by

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Rhode Island College

and

Dr. Barbara Brittingham
The University of Rhode Island

with computer data analysis by
Michael Cerullo
The University of Rhode Island

Prepared for
Rhode Island Educational Leadership Academy
LEAD Center Project

November, 1988

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[1] Note: Tables are numbered separately for survey and interview data.

Professional Development for Rhode Island School Administrators

Broadly stated, the purpose of Rhode Island's LEAD project is to improve the leadership capacity of school administrators. As part of the first year of project operation, the proposal submitted for federal funding called for a needs survey to provide background data on school administrators in the state and data that would inform the design of leadership and staff development activities.

The purpose of this report is to present the results of a survey conducted in late 1987 of Rhode Island school administrators (superintendents, assistant superintendents, principals, and assistant principals) and of a series of interviews conducted on a sample of superintendents and principals in late 1987 and early 1988.

Development of the Survey and Interview

The data collection plan was designed to provide useful information for the LEAD project and for other professional groups and institutions interested in Rhode Island's school administrators. The plan was developed with three factors in mind:

- First, in recent years, almost no data have been collected or reported on Rhode Island school administrators, their characteristics or perceived professional development needs. Therefore, we decided that the data that we did collect should include several background questions so that we could describe the population of interest.
- Second, since Rhode Island is a relatively small state in population as well as geography, we decided that we should survey all practicing administrators in job titles of interest rather than only a sample.
- Third, while questionnaires are useful instruments for gathering large amounts of data asked in uniform ways, face-to-face interviews are better at gathering more complex responses and for detecting answers to questions that we perhaps should have asked but did not; we decided to use a combination of questionnaires and interviews.

The design of our instrumentation was informed by several sources. Initial guidance was provided by the LEAD project proposal. Next, we searched the recent ERIC literature for material from similar surveys and for other writings about the desired content and delivery systems of professional development for school administrators. We reviewed, for example, discussions of the implications of effective schools research for school administrators, information from the NASSP Assessment Center Project on skills of effective principals, results of a Florida study on "high performing" principals, suggested competencies by the AASA for graduates of programs for school leaders, the results of a Georgia study of 500 principals, and an intensive study of 12 first- and second-year principals of their initial experiences.

We summarized the findings into notes which we shared with a small team of volunteers of practicing administrators and representation from the Rhode Island Department of Education. These volunteers helped us define the population, confirm that little or no useful data existed on practicing administrators in Rhode Island, and helped us think through the types of questions we should ask. Later, these volunteers reviewed a draft of the questionnaire and generously provided feedback to us.

Based on what we knew and heard from our panel, we decided to limit our questionnaire to four groups: superintendents, assistant superintendents, principals, and assistant principals. These groups represented the major categories of generalist school administrators. School committee members were being surveyed at about the same time on nearly the same issues, so we did not include them in our study. We designed four forms of the survey, one for each of our chosen job titles, but designed them to be nearly identical so that we could compare the responses of the groups whenever possible. (A copy of the four survey forms may be obtained from the authors.)

The development of the survey was informed by this process as well. The survey format was designed to elicit more open-ended responses from a sample of superintendents and principals to questions about their perceptions of various aspects of their work. A single form of the interview schedule was

used for both superintendents and principals. (A copy of the interview form appear may be obtained from the authors.)

The surveys were mailed from Rhode Island College with a cover letter in the Fall, 1987, with a follow-up of non-respondents in approximately three weeks after the original mailing. The source of the mailing list was at Rhode Island College. Survey data were analyzed at the University of Rhode Island on the University's mainframe IBM computer using SAS programs. The interviews were conducted during the Fall of 1987 and early Spring of 1988 and were analyzed at Rhode Island College.

Report of the Survey Data

Rate of Return Surveys were mailed to all Rhode Island superintendents, assistant superintendents, principals, and assistant principals. Table 1 presents the return rate overall and for each category of respondents.

Table 1. *Survey Response Rates.*

Job Titles Included in the Survey	No. Sent	No. Returned	Return Rate
Superintendent	37	26	70%
Assistant superintendent	34	25	74%
Principal	376	254	68%
(Public school)	(276)	(198)	(72%)
(Non-public school)	(100)	(56)	(56%)
Assistant principal	83	58	70%
All groups combined	523	363	69%

Overall, due to the cooperation of the school administrators whom we contacted, we are able to report responses for over two-thirds of our

population and 70% or more for each group except principals of non-public schools. We see this return rate as highly satisfactory, overall and for each category of respondents.

Information on Districts and Schools One way to provide information on our respondents and the context of their work is to look at some basic descriptive information about the districts and schools in which they work. Table 2 provides information on district and school size and numbers of teachers and professional staff. (Data in this table and most of the tables that follow are provided in percents.)

These data indicate that most respondents come from medium sized school districts; the modal district size reported was between 1,001 and 5,000 students. The typical superintendent works in a district with between 101 and 200 teachers and between 3 and 5 other professional staff in the district office. The modal principal works in a school with between 101 and 300 students and between 11 and 30 teachers.

Since small districts and small schools do not employ assistant administrators, as expected, assistant superintendents reported larger district sizes than did superintendents; and assistant principals reported larger building sizes than did principals. Also, since large districts have more schools -- and more principals -- than do small districts, the average principal works in a larger district than does the average superintendent.

A Note About National Comparisons At nearly the same time that the Rhode Island survey was being conducted, a national sample survey of superintendents and principals was also being conducted by the National Center for Educational Information (Feistritzer, 1988). Though the purpose and most of the items of that survey differed, some items on district size and respondent demographic information are virtually identical; those national data are included below in our report to provide context for the Rhode Island study.

Table 2. *Size Characteristics of Respondents' Districts and Schools, in Percents*

Item/Responses	Superintendents (n= 26)	Assistant Supts. (n=25)	Principals (n=254)	Assistant Principals (n=58)
Students in the district				
Fewer than 1000	12	0	18	2
1001 - 5,000	65	52	43	61
5001 - 10,000	19	28	24	23
More than 10,000	4	20	14	14
Teachers in the district				
50 or fewer	8	0		
51-100	4	0		
101-200	42	25		
201-300	12	21		
301-500	23	17		
More than 500	12	38		
Professional staff in district office other than yourself				
None	20	0		
1-2	24	21		
3-5	32	38		
6-10	12	29		
11-15	8	4		
Over 16	4	8		
Average daily enrollment in your school				
Fewer than 100			4	0
101-300			39	0
301-500			29	10
501-1000			20	51
1001-1500			6	30
More than 1500			2	9
How many teachers are in your school?				
10 or fewer			9	0
11-30			54	5
31-50			15	12
51-70			9	33
71-90			7	16
More than 90			7	34

How do our respondent district sizes compare with the national data? Table 3, below, includes the district enrollment size for our superintendent respondents, for all Rhode Island districts, and for U.S. districts. These data indicate that, on the average, our respondents are more likely to work in medium-sized districts (with enrollments between one and ten thousand students) and less likely to work in very small districts (with enrollments under one thousand students) than their national peers; Rhode Island does not differ significantly from the national data in the number of very large districts with over 10,000 students. District size for our respondents compared to the total distribution of Rhode Island districts indicates that respondent superintendents slightly under-represent small districts. (This interpretation should be viewed with caution, however, since there are more districts in Rhode Island than superintendents, the difference reflected in selected small districts.)

Table 3. *District Enrollment Size: For Survey Respondents, State, and National Data (Percents)*

Size	Survey Supts.	RI Districts*	U.S.Districts**
Fewer than 1,000 students	12	22	50
1,001 to 5,000	65	60	38
5,001 to 10,000	19	12	06
More than 10,000	4	5	05

*Average daily membership. *1986-87 Statistical Tables*, Rhode Island Department of Education.
**Data reported in Feistritzer (1988) reported from Market Data Retrieval, Westport, CT, March 27, 1987.

Grade Levels Served Respondents were asked to indicate, grade by grade, which grade levels were served by their district or their building. These data are summarized in Table 4. The great majority of superintendents and all assistant superintendents serve in K-12 districts. About two-thirds of the principals work in elementary schools; and slightly more than half of the assistant principals work in schools that serve senior high school students.

Table 4. *Grade Levels Included in Districts of Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent Respondents and in Buildings of Principal and Assistant Principal Respondents (in Percents)*

Grade levels included in*		*your district*		*your building*	
		Supts.	Asst. Supt.	Principals	Asst. Prin.
Elementary	(K-5 or 6)	4		32	12
Early elementary	(K- 2 , 3, or 4)			14	2
Upper elementary	(3 or 4 to 5 or 6)			4	2
All elementary	(K-8)	4		17	
Middle school	(4, 5, or 6 to 7 or 8)			4	10
Junior high	(7-8 or 7-9)			8	19
Senior high	(9 or 10-12)			12	42
All secondary	(7 or 8 -12)	4		6	12
All grades	(K-12)	88	100	3	

*K, in this table, represents pre-kindergarten and/or kindergarten

Characteristics of the Student Body The characteristics of a school environment may be known in significant part by a description of the student body. Table 5 presents characteristics reported by the respondents' districts, for various categories of students who often need special attention: low income students, gifted students, limited English speaking students, special education students, and "other" groups of students. For these items, superintendents and assistant superintendents reported the characteristics of their *district*, while principals and assistant principals described the student body in their *building*. As indicated by Table 5, the modal range (and always over half the respondents) chosen by these administrators, was from 1 to 25% of its students described in each of the major categories: low income, gifted, LES, and special education.

Since there is more variability between school buildings than between school districts on these characteristics, the responses of principals and assistant principals reflect greater variation than do the responses of superintendents and assistant superintendents.

Table 5. *Characteristics of Respondents' Districts (in Percents)*

Item/Responses	Superintendents (n= 25)	Assistant Supts. (n=23)	Principals (n=252)	Assistant Principals (n=57)
Proportion of each group	*served by your district*		*served by your school*	
Low income students				
None, zero percent	4	0	3	0
1-25%	80	74	71	72
26-50%	12	13	12	16
51-75%	4	4	6	5
76-100%	0	9	7	7
Gifted students				
None, zero percent	0	0	17	12
1-25%	92	96	79	82
26-50%	4	4	2	2
51-75%	4	0	1	0
76-100%	0	0	1	4
Limited English speaking students				
None, zero percent	24	17	38	26
1-25%	68	65	56	63
26-50%	4	13	3	7
51-75%	0	0	2	0
76-100%	4	4	1	4
Special Education students				
None, zero percent	0	0	17	2
1-25%	96	86	74	88
26-50%	0	9	6	5
51-75%	0	0	1	2
76-100%	1	4	2	4
Other				
None, zero percent	92	92	79	88
1-25%	4	8	17	11
26-50%	0	0	2	2
51-75%	0	0	1	0
76-100%	4	0	*	0

*Less than 1%

Characteristics of Administrators We gathered four types of background information on administrators: demographic or current status information, with some national comparisons; information about highest earned degrees; information about prior experience; and information about future plans.

Comparisons with National Demographic Information Table 6, below, shows how Rhode Island superintendents and principals compare on a series of demographic characteristics with their national counterparts from a recent national survey (Feistritzer, 1988).

Rhode Island superintendents are like their national peers on most measured characteristics: nearly all male, white, and with 15 or more years service in education. Rhode Island superintendents are more likely to hold the doctorate; nearly half of Rhode Island superintendent respondents but only about one third of the national sample reported having earned a doctorate.

Rhode Island public school principals, like their national counterparts, are predominantly male; eight out of ten public school respondent principals were men. Note, however, that only four out of ten non-public school principals are men. Nationwide, nine in ten public school principals are white; in Rhode Island 98% of respondent public school principals and all of the non-public school principals are white.

Rhode Island public school principals have more educational experience than their counterparts; 94 percent of the Rhode Island group has 16 or more years in education, compared with 88 percent of the national group. (Among Rhode Island non-public school principals, 76% have 16 or more years of experience; no comparable figure is available nationally.)

Rhode Island principals are less likely than their national peers to have earned the doctorate. Nine percent of public school principals nationally hold the doctorate, compared with six percent of public school principals in Rhode Island (and two percent of Rhode Island non-public school principals).

Table 6. *Sex , Race, and Years in Education for Survey Respondents and National Sample of Superintendents and Principals (Percents)*

Characteristic	National Sup'tendent*	Rhode Island Sup'tendent (n-25)	National Principal**	Rhode Island Principals Public (n=198)	Private (n=54)	Total (n=252)
Sex						
Men	96	92	76	80	39	71
Women	4	8	24	20	61	29
Race						
White	97	100	90	98	100	99
Black	1	0	6	1	0	1
Other	2	0	4	1	0	***
Years in Education****						
1-5 years	0	0	0	0	2	***
6-10 years	***	0	2	1	6	2
11-15 years	5	0	10	5	17	8
16 or more years	95	100	88	94	76	90
Percent with doctorate	34	46	9	6	2	5

* Superintendents from districts with 10,000 +enrollment were over-sampled in the national survey.
** Data from national sample are reported for public school principals
*** Less than 1%
**** Ranges are from RI survey; values for national survey are: Less than 5 years; 5-9 years; 10-14 years; and 15 or more years.

Additional Demographic Information Table 7 presents additional demographic data on our respondents, by job title. These data indicate that Rhode Island administrators are overwhelmingly white males (except, as noted above, non-public-school principals the majority of whom are white females). The great majority work full-time at their administrative assignment and have worked in education sixteen or more years.

Nearly all of our administrators report they have been working in education for 16 or more years. Their length of experience in their current title varies by position. More superintendents and principals than their assistants have been working in their current title for 16 or more years.

Indeed, among assistant superintendents and assistant principals, about half have been serving in that job title for five years or less. Among superintendents and principals, the range of experience is great, with significant percentages reporting experience in the job classification of five years or less and significant percentages reporting 16 years or more.

Table 7. *Background and Current Duties of Respondents*

Item/Responses	Superintendents (n= 26)	Assistant Supts. (n=25)	Principals (n= 254)	Assistant Principals (n=58)
Race				
White	100	96	99	98
Black	0	4	1	0
Other	0	0	*	2
Sex				
Male	92	96	71	84
Female	8	4	29	16
Proportion of duties that are currently assigned as above title				
Full time or essentially	96	92	93	88
Half time or more	4	4	5	9
Less than half time	0	4	2	3
Years of professional service in education, including this year				
1-5 years	0	0	*	2
6-10 years	0	0	2	2
11-15 years	0	4	8	5
16 or more years	100	96	90	91
Years of service with above title, including this year				
1-5	27	52	38	47
6-10	35	24	16	19
11-15	4	12	17	17
16 or more years	35	12	30	17
Overall satisfaction with current position				
Extremely satisfied	32	20	30	16
Very satisfied	52	60	47	48
Moderately satisfied	12	16	20	31
Somewhat dissatisfied	0	0	2	5
Very dissatisfied	4	4	1	0

Overall, administrators are satisfied with their current position. Superintendents are most content, with 84% indicating they are "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with their current position; assistant principals trail, with 64% reporting this level of satisfaction. Line administrators (superintendents and principals) report higher level of satisfaction than do staff administrators (assistant superintendents and assistant principals).

Highest Earned Degree for Administrators We analyzed three pieces of information about the highest earned degree for administrators: the level of degree, the year the degree was completed, and the institution granting the degree.

Table 8 summarizes the year and level of highest earned degree by job title. The typical administrator completed his highest earned degree ten to fifteen years ago; degrees of assistant superintendents and assistant principals are two to three years "newer," on average, than those of superintendents or principals. (Since we have not analyzed reported credit-bearing education beyond the highest degree, no inferences should be drawn from Table 8 about continuing education for credit of these administrators.)

Table 9 summarizes the number and percent of administrators in each job title for whom the highest degree is the bachelors, the master's the specialist, and the doctorate.

Virtually all of our administrators report at least a master's degree; and in general the higher the level of position, the more education the respondent is likely to report. Sharp distinctions are reported in the level of education between district and building administrators. Over half of the superintendents and assistant superintendents have certificates or degrees beyond the masters, but only about one fifth of the principals and assistant principals report this level of education.

Table 8. *Year and Level of Highest Degree by Job Title (Frequencies)*

Year	Superintendents	Assistant Superintendents	Principals	Assistant Principals
1953			2	
1954				
1955			1	
1956				1
1957	1			
1959		1	1	
1960			3	
1961			5	
1962	2	2	3	1
1963			2	
1964	3		3	1
1965	1	1	9	2
1966			9	1
1967	1	1	7	3
1968	1		8	2
1969	1		5	2
1970		2	11	1
1971			7	
1972	2	2	13	
1973			8	2
1974	1		7	2
1975	*		13*	2
1976	1	1	5	4
1977		1	8	4*
1978	2	1*	14	1
1979		1	7	1
1980	1	2	7	5
1981	3		7	1
1982		1	9	3
1983	4	2	8	1
1984	1	2	15	1
1985		1	9	4
1986	1		10	4
1987		1	8	2
1988		1	1	
Total Number Reporting Year	26	23	225	51
Median Year of Highest Degree*	1975	1978	1975	1977

*Median year of highest degree is noted in the distribution with an asterisk.

Table 9. *Percent of Administrators by Level of Highest Degree*

Number/Percent/ Degrees	Superintendents	Assistant Superintendents	Principals	Assistant Principals
Percent for whom the highest degree is				
Bachelor's	0	4	2	3
Master's	31	40	75	78
Specialist or C.A.G.S.	23	32	18	16
Doctorate	46	24	5	3

Table 10 summarizes the institutions from which respondent administrators earned their highest degree, for the most frequently reported institutions. Together, these 13 institutions account for 87% of the highest degrees reported.

Table 10. *Institution Granting Highest Degree, by Job Title, for Most Frequently Reported Institutions (Frequency)* [1]

Institution	Superintendent	Assistant Superintendent	Principal	Assistant Principal
Boston College	1	1	6	1
Brown University	1		3	
Providence College	1	4	35	19
Rhode Island College	3	7	94	22
University of Connecticut	3	4	17	4
University of Rhode Island	4	2	12	3
Nova University	2	1	6	
Boston University	2	2	6	
Bridgewater State, MA	1		5	1
Southern Connecticut State			2	
Northeastern University	1		2	
Rivier College, NH			2	
Roger Williams College			2	

[1] These institutions graduated two or more respondents in the survey.

The greatest relative diversity among highest-degree institutions is for superintendents. The greatest concentration at a single institution is for principals; 42% of principals responding to this item report that their highest degree was earned from Rhode Island College. Among assistant principals, Rhode Island College is the most frequently reported institution, followed closely by Providence College. Altogether, 45% of respondent administrators report earning their highest degree at Rhode Island College.

Prior Experience of Administrators School administrators have typically held other jobs in education before their current title. Table 11 reports the percent of administrators who have prior service in various other education jobs. The tradition of prior service as a teacher is well-reflected in these data, and it is clear that many administrators have prior teaching experience at more than one level. The teaching experience of superintendents is relatively well balanced among grade levels, with the largest percent reporting prior teaching experience at the junior high level.

Among building administrators, prior teaching experience is a reflection of the availability of administrative positions. That is, among principals, the most frequent teaching experience is at the elementary level (probably reflecting, in part, the larger number of elementary schools and elementary principals); among assistant principals, prior teaching experience is most often reported at the senior high level (where there are also more assistant principal positions).

A few other generalizations about career paths can be suggested from these data. Most superintendents and many assistant superintendents have prior service as building principals. Most superintendents and assistant superintendents have prior experience in another central office position. Serving as a librarian is unlikely to lead to work as an administrator; likewise, the great majority of administrators report no prior experience as guidance counselors.

Table 11. *Percent of Administrators Who Have Served in Other Positions*

Other Education Positions	Supts.	Asst. Supts.	Principals	Asst. Principals
Teacher, elementary	46	32	62	16
Teacher, junior high	54	44	38	40
Teacher, senior high	31	60	26	66
Guidance counselor	0	24	9	10
Librarian	0	0	*	0
Coach	31	24	11	22
Assistant coach	na	na	3	19
Assistant Principal	27	36	35	na
Principal	65	40	na	2
Central Office administrator	77	68	13	10
Other	19	36	25	33

*Less than 1%

Table 12 reports the average years of service in other positions for administrators who held these other positions.

Table 12. *Mean Years of Service in Other Positions*[1]

Other Education Position	Supts.	Asst. Supts.	Principals	Assistant Principals
Teacher, elementary	5	4	10	7
Teacher, junior high	7	7	6	8
Teacher, senior high	8	6	7	11
Teacher (all levels combined)	8	9	11	12
Guidance counselor	0	8	5	11
Librarian	0	0	3	0
Coach	8	10	8	12
Assistant coach	na	na	7	4
Assistant Principal	5	5	5	6
Principal	6	4	na	3
Central Office administrator	7	9	7	na
Other	5	7	6	10

[1] Table includes the mean number of years served, calculated on the basis of those administrators who have served in a given position (e.g., among principals who had previously served as elementary teachers, the average length of service as an elementary teacher was 10 years.)

Perhaps the most significant observation about the prior experience of the respondents is that the length of teaching experience for Rhode Island school administrators is substantial: *the average respondent has 11 years of classroom teaching experience,* sufficient classroom experience to advance well beyond the difficulties of beginning teachers and provide a depth of empathetic understanding of classroom challenges to be supportive of teachers and students in the building and the district.

Plans for the Future Our survey included two items that asked administrators about their current plans. Table 13, below, asks administrators how long they planned to continue to work in school administration. These data project the most rapid turnover in superintendents and the least rapid turnover in assistant principals. Over one in five superintendents plans to leave school administration within one year, and more than three in five plan to leave within five years. Among principals, the largest job category, about two in five report that they plan to leave school administration within five years.

Table 13. *Current Plans of School Administrators, in Percents*[1]

Years to Work in School Administration	Supts.	Asst. Supts.	Principals	Asst. Principals
0-1 years	21	9	7	9
2-5 years	42	30	34	16
6-10 years	21	35	35	38
11 or more years	17	26	24	38

[1]How many years do you plan to continue working in school administration after this year in your current job or in another school administration position?

The second item about current plans asked administrators to select from a range of possible future plans; results are reported in Table 14. Overall, the

most common choice was to stay in the current job until retirement. Among superintendents, 46% selected this alternative; another 21% indicated they planned to continue as a superintendent but seek a job in another district. It is interesting to note that 43% of the assistant superintendents indicated they would seek a superintendent's job, and 45% of the assistant principals indicated they would seek a principal's job.

No central administrators and very few building administrators indicated they planned to return to classroom teaching.

Table 14. *Current Professional Plans of Administrators, in Percents*

Current Plans	Sup'tendents.	Assistant Sup'tdent	Principal	Assistant Principals
Continue in present job until retirement	46	38	35	20
Continue as [TITLE], but look for different district	21	0	12	0
Retire early from school administration, within five years from now	12	5	8	9
Continue in administration, but work in a central office job	0	0	17	7
Seek a principal's job	na	na	na	45
Seek a superintendent's job	na	43	na	na
Return to classroom teaching within five years	0	0	4	2
Change to college or university work	4	0	3	na
Leave education within five years; work in another field until retirement	0	0	6	7
Other	4		4	
"Other" plus "Continue in present job until retirement	4	5	6	4
"Other" plus another choice except continue in present job	4	10	4	7
Complete requirements for retirement, then pursue another career	4		*	

* Less than 1%

na= not asked. Zeroes (0) indicate a presented choice that was not selected by any respondents. Rows below "Other" represent coded choices from respondents who indicated more than one choice describe an "other."

Areas for Professional Development

What topics do administrators define as important in their work? What areas do they find challenging in their jobs? What are the areas which they identify as the ones on which they would like to work toward improvement?

We approached the answers to these questions in several related ways in our survey. As described in an earlier section of this report, drawing on professional literature and the suggestions of our panelists, we established a list of items or topics that represented traditional areas of administrative duty (such as managing materials and facilities, dealing legal issues) as well as challenges suggested by recent literature (such as establishing an orderly and peaceful climate). Items presented to building administrators were slightly different in two ways: the final four items, duties important to district administrators, were not included; and a few items were re-worded slightly to be more appropriate for principals and assistant principals (e.g., "Running the school" rather than "Running the district.").

Respondents were asked to rate each item twice on five-point scales, once according to how important the item was to their job category and second according to how challenging it was to their job category. Each rating was on a five point scale, ranging from "very important" to "not important," and from "very challenging" to "not challenging." In addition, respondents were asked to select up to three items that they "would most like to work on to develop your own skills." Means for each group on the importance and challenge of each item are presented in Appendix A.

Importance and Challenge Ratings Table 15 presents one way to summarize the importance and challenge ratings for these items. In Table 15, each item is presented, and notations are given for those items for each group for which the importance and challenge item means were over 4.00 on a 5.00 scale (i.e., the item was rated as both "important" and "challenging" by the group). Also noted (with an asterisk) are items that were rated "very important" (i.e., over 4.50) even though they were not rated as particularly "challenging," on the average.

Table 15. *Professional Development Items Presented for Importance and Challenge Ratings*[1]

Supt.	Asst. Supt	Prin.	Asst Prin.	Item
•		•	ap	a. Establishing an orderly and peaceful climate in the district/school
s	a	p	ap	b. Establishing high expectations for *teachers* in the district/school
s		p	ap	c. Establishing high expectations for *Students* in the district/school
	a			d. Setting student goals for learning that are accepted in the district/school
				e. Having a system that regularly assesses the student's achivement
			•	f. "Running the district/school" so that things don't "just happen"
s	a	p		g. Developing a systematic curriculum that is based on the learning goals and feedback from assessment
s				h. Using political skills in support of education (public relations, communication, negotiation)
				i. Managing finances
				j. Managing facilities and materials
			ap	k. Managing time
			ap	l. Resolving conflicts
				m. Developing staff capacity to do paperwork
				n. Making oral presentations to groups
				o. Writing effectively (proposals, curriculum, newsletters)
				p. Using school data to improve curriculum and instruction
s		p	ap	q. Evaluating teachers
•				r. Making important personnel decisions
	a			s. Providing staff development programs and activities
				t. Dealing with legal issues of the district
s	a	p	ap	u. Building a sense of unified direction among the district/school staff
				v. Working productively with individual schools.
				w. Deciding on important priorities for the year
				x. Obtaining resources to help achieve priorities
				y. Understanding the best way to get things done in the district
				z. Establishing systems to keep track of students, budgets, materials
s	a	p		aa. Developing and articulating a clear vision for the district/school
s	•	--	--	bb. Working effectively with the school committee
		--	--	cc. Working effectively with municipal officials
		--	--	dd. Keeping good relations with the media
s	a	--	--	ee. Dealing effectively with the unions (negotiations, grievances, etc.

[1] Items marked with an "s" were rated as 4.00 or higher on a 5.00 scale for "importance" and for "challenge" by superintendents. Items marked by an "a" met this criterion for assistant superintendents; "p" for principals; and "ap" for assistant principals. Items marked with an asterisk (*) were rated as 4.50 or higher on the importance scale, but lower than 4.00 on the challenge scale. Items bb through ee were not asked of building administrators.

Admittedly, the summary of the item ratings presented in Table 15 is somewhat arbitrarily constructed; the item means available in Appendix A offer others the opportunity to choose another way to summarize or highlight the same information.

Some points of consensus emerge from these ratings. *All four groups rated two items as both important and challenging:*

- (b) "Establishing high expectations for teachers in the district/school"
- (u) "Building a sense of unified direction among the district/school staff."

Four items were identified as *important and challenging by three of the four groups*:

- (c) "establishing high expectations for students in the district/school,"
- (g) "developing a systematic curriculum that is based on the learning goals and feedback from assessment,"
- (q) "evaluating teachers," and
- (aa) "developing and articulating a clear mission for the district/school."

Taken together, these six items suggest that administrators share a concern for having a clear sense of mission and purpose and focusing the energies of school personnel on the important tasks of teaching and learning.

Some tasks central to individual groups also emerged from the ratings; these choices of one group, not selected by other groups, highlight the unique administrative focus of each of our groups of respondents.

The particular concerns of superintendents are highlighted by their ratings of these items as important and challenging: (h) "using political skills in support of education"; (aa) "working effectively with school committees"; and (ee) "dealing effectively with the unions." (Assistant superintendents also rated this last item as important and challenging.)

Using these criteria, assistant superintendents selected two items that were not highlighted by other groups: (d): "setting student goals for learning

that are accepted in the district"; and (s) "providing staff development programs and activities."

No task was highlighted as both important and challenging by principals that did not meet these criteria for at least one other group. This phenomenon helps point out the central role of the principal, whose concerns range from those of the first-line staff administrators to those of the district's chief officer.

Unique selections for assistant principals include: (a) "establishing an orderly and peaceful climate in the school" [rated as very important by superintendents and principals]; (k) "managing time;" and (l) "resolving conflicts." These items reflect the role of the assistant principal as peacekeeper in the building and the concern for time management important to new administrators with conflicting demands on their time and many unscheduled disruptions in their work day.

Which items were of little concern to administrators? We examined the tables in Appendix A, looking for items that were rated below 4.00 on both importance and challenge, suggesting that administrators thought these topics as of neither pressing importance nor of great challenge. In Table 15, no item before (h) met these criteria for any of the four groups. Four items met the criteria of *low interest for all four groups*:

- (j) "managing facilities and materials";
- (m) "developing staff capacity to do paperwork";
- (n) "making oral presentations to groups"; and
- (t) "dealing with legal issues."

Another four items met these criteria of *low interst for three of the four groups*:

- (i) "managing finances";
- (o) "writing effectively";
- (y) "understanding the best way to get things done in the district";
- (z) "establishing systems to keep track of students, budgets, and materials."

Taken together, low ratings for these items suggest that administrators are not particularly concerned with items reflecting traditional administrative (as opposed to management or leadership) issues, nor are they particularly

concerned with their verbal communication skills. Speculating, one may assume that administrators feel that their skills in these areas have been developed sufficiently through prior education or experience to the point where they feel confident in their abilities.

Differences among groups are also worth note. For example, although superintendents select (h) "using political skills in support of education" as important and challenging, building administrators do not rate this item above 4.00 on either scale. Also, assistant principals, alone among the four groups, do not rate the following topics as particularly important or challenging: (p) "using school data to improve curriculum and instruction"; (s) "providing staff development programs and activities"; and (x) "deciding on important priorities for the year."

Selections for Professional Development Are the items that administrators rate as important and challenging to their work the same items that they identify as areas on which they would most like to work for their own professional development? Table 16, below, summarizes the choices that administrators make, among the items presented, as areas that they would like to work on to develop their own skills.

Overall, the data in Table 16 and the data from Table 15 tell essentially the same story: items that met our admittedly arbitrary criteria for selection as most "important" and "challenging" (Table 15) are also chosen by substantial proportions of administrators as one of their top three priorities to work on (Table 16). For all administrative groups, the priorities for professional development are these items:

- Establishing high expectations for *teachers* (b)
- Establishing high expectations for *students* (c)
- Developing a systematic curriculum that is based on learning goals and feedback from assessment (g)
- Evaluating teachers (q)
- Building a sense of unified direction among the district/school staff (u)
- Developing and articulating a clear vision for the school/district (aa).

Table 16. *Percent of Administrators Choosing Each Topic as Their First, Second, or Third Choice to Work on Their Own Skills*

Supt.	Asst. Supt	Prin.	Asst Prin.	Item
0	4	12	31	a. Establishing an orderly and peaceful climate in the district/school
38	21	35	34	b. Establishing high expectations for *teachers* in the district/school
25	12	29	42	c. Establishing high expectations for *students* in the district/school
4	8	10	4	d. Setting student goals for learning that are accepted in the district/school
0	0	13	4	e. Having a system that regularly assesses the student's achievement
12	17	10	11	f. "Running the district/school" so that things don't "just happen"
25	38	25	16	g. Developing a systematic curriculum that is based on the learning goals and feedback from assessment
8	12	7	4	h. Using political skills in support of education (public relations, communication, negotiation)
8	4	3	9	i. Managing finances
4	0	1	0	j. Managing facilities and materials
8	4	14	20	k. Managing time
4	8	8	14	l. Resolving conflicts
0	0	2	0	m. Developing staff capacity to do paperwork
0	4	2	0	n. Making oral presentations to groups
4	0	5	4	o. Writing effectively (proposals, curriculum, newsletters)
8	8	16	7	p. Using school data to improve curriculum and instruction
25	12	27	20	q. Evaluating teachers
12	8	7	7	r. Making important personnel decisions
8	33	18	7	s. Providing staff development programs and activities
8	4	2	4	t. Dealing with legal issues of the district
17	30	19	16	u. Building a sense of unified direction among the district/school staff
0	4	2	2	v. Working productively with individual schools.
4	8	2	6	w. Deciding on important priorities for the year
12	0	7	4	x. Obtaining resources to help achieve priorities
4	8	2	9	y. Understanding the best way to get things done in the district
0	0	4	9	z. Establishing systems to keep track of students, budgets, materials
16	21	17	11	aa. Developing and articulating a clear vision for the district/school
25	4	--	--	bb. Working effectively with the school committee
0	0	--	--	cc. Working effectively with municipal officials
4	4	--	--	dd. Keeping good relations with the media
8	17	--	--	ee. Dealing effectively with the unions (negotiations, grievances, etc.)

These priorities (from Tables 15 and 16) indicate that, taken as a group, superintendents and principals, along with their assistants, selected items that clearly relate to the teaching and learning mission of the schools. Taken together, these items focus on the importance of shared vision and unified direction, high expectations for teachers and students, and the relationship between curriculum and assessment.

Choices that were important to one group but not the other emphasize how various members of these school administrative teams make particular contributions to overall school and district goals: superintendents selected "working effectively with school committees"; assistant superintendents selected "providing staff development programs and activities"; and assistant principals selected "establishing an orderly and peaceful environment in the school." Interestingly, the most important choices of principals were also the choices of other administrative groups, underscoring the central role of the principal in schools.

Preferred Learning Formats

In what format are administrators interested in engaging in professional development activities? What locations are most convenient or attractive? What schedules are most appealing? What other aspects of continuing education would make offerings appealing? Our questionnaire presented 17 choices of learning formats, ranging from the conventional (e.g., after-hours sessions held in the district and evening classes held on campuses) to newer forms of professional development (e.g., electronic mail communication and assessment center experiences). Respondents were asked to rate each learning format on a five point scale, ranging from "Very interesting; I would enjoy learning this way," to "Not interesting to me; I don't enjoy this format."

Mean ratings for items for each administrator group are presented in Table 17. Higher means represent a stronger level of interest in the learning format.

Table 17. *Average ratings of interest in various learning formats by group*[1]

	Learning Format	Rating by Group			
		Supt.	Asst. Supt.	Principal	Asst. Prin.
a.	Sessions held in my district after hours	3.00	3.26	3.30	3.10
b.	Retreat sessions, held away from the district, scheduled for an overnight session	3.62	3.26	3.21	3.03
c.	Meetings in a conference center or hotel, held away from my district	4.27	3.92	3.88	4.19
d.	Small group sessions held with a group of peers meeting semi-formally over a period of several weeks or months, seminar style	4.00	4.13	3.79	3.63
e.	Working on a specific project or idea, paired a mentor and meeting periodically	2.85	3.70	3.26	2.64
f.	Class-type sessions held in the evening on a campus	2.27	2.26	2.17	2.31
g.	Class-type sessions held in the later afternoon on a campus	1.96	2.09	2.08	2.24
h.	Weekend sessions, held on Friday evenings and on Saturdays, once or twice a month.	2.15	1.48	1.74	1.70
i.	Early morning sessions, at 7:30 or earlier, once or twice a month	2.88	2.65	2.16	1.98
j.	Half-day sessions, held on a school-day	3.42	3.87	3.53	3.24
k.	All-day sessions, held on a school-day	3.31	3.35	3.29	3.22
l.	One evening a month in a somewhat relaxed setting	3.15	3.35	3.39	3.22
m.	Week-long sessions at the end of June	1.96	2.74	2.25	2.40
n.	Week-long session sometime in July or August	2.62	2.74	2.42	2.78
o.	An assessment center experience for 2-3 days, followed by feedback about my strengths as an administrator and help designing a plan to work on other areas.	3.35	3.00	3.16	3.14
p.	Communicating regularly with a group of peers by electronic mail on a specific topic or professional issues in general	2.65	2.91	2.51	2.32
q.	Organized sessions where I present or lead a group as well as learn from others.	3.15	3.05	2.62	2.46

1. Based on a five point scale, where: 5 = Very interesting; I would enjoy learning this way. 4 = Interesting as a learning format. 3 = Somewhat interesting; I might give this a try. 2 = Less interesting; I would be unlikely to participate in this format. 1 = Not interesting to me; I don't enjoy this type of format.

In general, the most appealing choices were:

•c) Meetings in a conference center or hotel, held away from my district; and

•d) Small group discussions held with a group of peers meeting semi-formally over a period of several weeks or months, seminar style.

These items captured all of the first- and second- highest ratings for all four administrator groups.

Administrators expressed the *least interest* in these items:

•h) Weekend sessions, held Friday evenings and on Saturdays, once a month; and

•g) Class-type sessions held in the later afternoon on a campus.

(However, it is interesting to note the moderate interest in item a) "Sessions held in my district after hours," suggesting that the time of day, per se, is not unappealing.)

Moderate interest for all groups was indicated for these formats: j) Half-day sessions, held on a school-day; k) All-day sessions, held on a school-day; and l) One evening a month in a somewhat relaxed session.

Responses to some items varied considerably among groups of administrators. Early morning sessions, at 7:30 or earlier, once or twice a month (item i), were most appealing to superintendents and least appealing to assistant principals, with the other two groups falling somewhere in between. (The attractiveness of this format may be related to whether the administrator has duties specific to the early morning, start of school hours.) Similar patterns of response, most attractive to superintendents and least attractive to assistant principals, were noted for b) "Retreat sessions, held away form the district, scheduled for an overnight session"; and q) "Organized sessions where I present or lead a group as well as learn from others."

The idea of working on a specific project or idea, paired with a mentor and meeting periodically (item e) was fairly attractive to assistant superintendents and, to a lesser degree to principals, but relatively unattractive to either superintendents or assistant principals.

Week-long sessions in June (item m) or July or August (item n) were not particularly attractive to any group, overall; superintendents were particularly uninterested in the June option.

Two items reflected more innovative formats. The response to item o) "An assessment center experience for 2-3 days, followed by feedback about my strengths as an administrator" received moderate interest from all groups, with superintendents giving the most positive ratings. The idea of "communicating regularly with a group of peers by electronic mail on a specific topic or professional issues in general" (item p) did not appear appealing to most respondents, perhaps due to lack of experience with this format.

The Interviews

Interviews were conducted with a selection of school administrators from each of the four categories during the period between December 1987 and March 1988. One interviewer (one of the two investigators) conducted all of the interviews and used a common list of questions for all of the interviews and a form to record all of the responses.

A list of questions was put together by the investigators and shared with the Board of Directors of the Rhode Island Educational Leadership Academy for their advice and suggestions. A revised list was submitted to three administrators and two persons from the Rhode Island Department of Education for further refinement. A final protocol incorporated all of the suggestions received.

The selection of school administrators to be interviewed was made on the basis of availability and personal schedule. No one who was asked refused to be interviewed. Care was taken to achieve reasonable representation among relevant categories. Table 1 presents relevant characteristics of those interviewed.

Table 1. *Characteristics of Respondents*

	No.	Male	Female	Public	Private
Superintendents	8	6	2	8	0
Assistant Superintendents	2	2	0	2	0
Principals	16	11	5	14	2
Assistant Principals	2	0	2	2	0
Total	28	19	9	26	2

Job Satisfaction

All of those interviewed were asked about their level of satisfaction with school administration and whether or not their work in administration met their expectations. While many superintendents were not sure what their expectations were when they accepted a position in school administration, particularly their present position, only one expressed frustration and disappointment with school administration. He specifically regretted that he was not able to accomplish fully the academic achievement goals he had set out for his district. He had thought that with good organization and management, substantive change in the program's effectiveness could be accomplished. Another wished that he had more coursework in school law, school finance, and personnel management and felt that his effectiveness could have been enhanced in his early years in his position had he more preparation for it. All other superintendents, however, expressed general satisfaction with their careers. Their responses included such statements as "I wanted some excitement and I sure got it", "I was surprised pleasantly by the latitude the school committee has given me, I didn't think they would".

All of the superintendents interviewed complained about the work load and the increasing demands on their time both professional and personal. Some expressed concern about their ability to continue the pace of attendance at meetings, public hearings, and testimonials, together with the obligation to keep up with the paperwork. Most said their workload frequently consumes between 60 to 80 hours per week.

Superintendents identified four general categories as the sources of their greatest satisfaction derived from school administration. The first is in helping students achieve, grow and develop. The second is in planning and creating programs and seeing that they are implemented well. The third is less specific and found in "creating positive change". The fourth is in "bringing people together" in fruitful working relationships.

Their dissatisfactions are various. Some mentioned the "wearying" hours that "drained energy and dulled enthusiasm". Several spoke about their inability to achieve all the goals they established or to accomplish all the work they had to do. A few gave as the reason the "collective bargaining agreements" that "tied their hands" or the diminishing public support or the fact that "you don't have as much power as you think you will have when you go into this job." One superintendent seemed to sum it up best by saying "the job would be a heck of a lot more tolerable if I didn't have to deal with so many negative people, especially teachers themselves".

Among principals, a greater number expressed dissatisfaction with their positions than did superintendents. Those who were dissatisfied stated that they "expected to have more time for instructional leadership" but instead found themselves responding to demands in areas not related to instruction, such as buildings and grounds, demands by custodians and parents. Another expressed well a view held by several. He expected to find "an organized and professionally run bureaucracy, non-political and adequately funded". Instead, he found "very little professionalism", decisions made on the basis of "politics, or whom you know", with no "incentive or encouragement to do the job creatively". A junior high principal found the job as "one continuous challenge of putting out fires -- a hindrance really to the exercise of leadership". Several principals were surprised at the "lack of professionalism among their teachers" or too many "restrictions by the union contract". Still others wished that they could have "more autonomy over the school budget, personnel, resources, etc." or be ". . . able to provide more direction in curriculum development", or have "more assistance to do the job well". A few found some disappointment in the tension created by the management style of the "central office" or their inability to have an influence on decisions made at that level.

More principals, however, expressed general satisfaction with administration than not. One newly-appointed principal said he was "doing more work but enjoying it". Another newly-appointed assistant principal stated "I am happy to stay with it for a while". Another principal of more than five years stated she was "more than happy".

Nearly all of the principals found their greatest satisfactions in the progress and achievement of their students. Virtually every principal mentioned their students in some manner in discussing the sources of their satisfaction with their administrative position. A number also mentioned other sources. For example, "working with dedicated teachers", "improving teacher morale" were typical responses of those principals who found satisfaction in working with their staff. Others mentioned planning for necessary resources to implement good programs and managing those resources; developing a consistency in school policies, especially in dealing with students, and having an impact on educational policy.

Concerning their greatest dissatisfactions, the principals were more in agreement than were the superintendents. A plurality mentioned their frustrations either with the organization or administrative control. Such responses as "having my hands tied", "having to support decisions and policies I don't agree with", "too much time on administrivia", "not enough time to think, talk, discuss professional issues", "spend too much time on grievances", "lack of professional behavior of the staff". Some mentioned their failures with students, "unsuccessful students" and, poignantly, "situations in children's lives that I can't do anything about".

Authority in Decision-Making

Superintendents and principals were asked to rate their level of authority in making decisions in matters concerning the budget; hiring and evaluating personnel; curriculum, policy development, and planning; and resolving conflict among administrators, teachers, parents and students. They were also asked to identify which of these areas was the most troublesome for them.

In the table below are displayed the responses of superintendents, including the two assistant superintendents, to the question concerning their perception of the level of their authority to make decisions in selected areas of administration.

Table 2. *Decision Making Authority: Superintendents and Assistant Superintendents*

Decisions	High Level	Medium Level	Low Level
Budget decisions	6	4	0
Hiring new personnel	7	3	0
Evaluating personnel	10	0	0
Curriculum decisions	8	2	0
Program and policy development	5	5	0
Strategic and long range planning	7	3**	0
Conflict resolution among:			
administrators	8	2	
teachers	7	2	1*
parents	7	2	1*
students	8		2*

* one of these responses was made by an assistant superintendent
** two of these responses were from assistant superintendents

There were few real surprises in these responses from the superintendents. Three superintendents, or about one third of those interviewed, felt that they did not have a high level of authority in hiring new personnel, but indicated the decision was shared with principals and other personnel.

Concerning the question of the most troublesome area, responses ranged among all categories and no pattern emerged. A couple of superintendents indicated that they have a different problem each year -- "this year it was the budget, last year it was the parents, next year I expect it will be the teachers because of a new program we are trying to implement."

The principals were asked their perceptions about their level of authority in decision making. Their responses were different from those of superintendents.

Given below are the responses from the principals.

Table 3. *Decision Making Authority: Principals and Assistant Principals*

	High Level	Medium Level	Low Level
Budget decisions	5	5	8*
Hiring new personnel	9	0	9*
Evaluating personnel	14	3	1
Curriculum decisions	5	12	1
Program and policy development	6	9	3
Strategic and long range planning	3	9	6
Conflict resolutions among:			
administrators	4	1	13
teachers	14	2	2
parents	18	0	0
students	18	0	0

* Two responses from assistant principals

An interesting response from among the above is the split in numbers between those principals who feel they have high level of authority in hiring new personnel (nine) and those who don't (nine). Although two assistant principals' responses are included in the latter number, it should be remembered that two parochial school principals' responses are included in the former. The point to be made here is that reflected in this sampling is a rather large number of principals who feel that they have a low level of authority in hiring or engaging new personnel for their school. The implications of that item are deepened when one notes the low number of principals who feel only a medium or low level of authority in making decisions for curriculum, program and policy development, or strategic and long range planning. A few principals expressed regret that they do not have more control over their budget.

Most principals identified their most troublesome areas in exercising their authority to be in resolving conflicts with teachers, in hiring new teachers, or in evaluating teachers. Two principals mentioned parent conflicts; and one each, student conflicts and budget decisions.

Difficulty in Decision-Making

With regard to the question about the level of difficulty in making decisions, the superintendents responded as follows.

Table 4. *Decision Making Difficulty: Superintendents and Assistant Superintendents*

Level	High Level	Medium Level	Low
Budget decisions	1	1	8
Hiring new personnel	0	4	6
Evaluating personnel	3	2	5
Curriculum decisions	0	4	6
Conflict resolution	2	5	3
Resource allocation	4	2	4

No pattern emerged from the superintendents' responses concerning the most troublesome area for them. Each superintendent identified a different area or volunteered an area not listed, for example, custodian grievances.

The principals' responses to the level of difficulty in making decisions in selected areas are provided below.

Table 5. *Decision Making Difficulty: Principals and Assistant Principals*

	High Level	Medium Level	Low Level
Budget decisions	6	3	9
Hiring new personnel	9	2	7
Evaluating personnel	9	5	4
Curriculum decisions	0	10	8
Conflict resolution	3	11	4
Resource allocation	6	8	4

In explaining their responses concerning budget decisions, a few principals said their budget was "peanuts" and only contained a modest amount for operations. Hence they reported a "low" level of difficulty since they didn't have much to spend in the first place. On the other hand, a few also said their budget was modest and so they had problems in setting priorities. The latter few reflected these views also under "Resource allocation."

Difficult Groups

Another issue examined was the degree of difficulty superintendents and principals encountered in working with various groups. The superintendents were asked to characterize their relations with groups and the level of difficulty they had in their relations with them. Their responses to this question are provided below.

Table 6. *Group Relations: Superintendents and Assistant Superintendents*

	Positive or Low Level of Difficulty	Neutral or Medium Level of Difficulty	Negative or High Level of Difficulty
School committees	5	3	2
Principals	3	7	0
Other administrators	8	2	0
Teachers individually	9	1	0
Teachers collectively	5	3	2
Secretaries	9	1	0
Custodians	5	5	0
Students	10	0	0
Parents	5	5	0
Community groups	10	0	0

As the figures show, superintendents in general feel that they get along very well with all of their constituent groups. Only two identified school committees and teachers collectively as groups providing some difficulty. But then half of them also said they had positive relations with these groups.

Principals were identified as a group which caused a majority of the superintendents a medium level of difficulty. Custodians and parents were two other groups that presented at least half of the superintendents a medium level of difficulty. Three superintendents volunteered another category -- unions.

When asked the question which group is the most troublesome, however, six superintendents identified teachers either as a group alone or combined with another group, such as principals or school committees. Other responses were scattered.

The reaction of the principals was as follows.

Table 7. *Group Relations: Principals and Assistant Principals*

	Positive or Low Level of Difficulty	Neutral or Medium Level of Difficulty	Negative or High Level of Difficulty
School Committees*	12	1	3
Principals*	13	4	0
Other Administrators	11	5	2
Teachers Individually	9	8	1
Teachers Collectively	13	3	2
Secretaries	17	1	0
Custodians	10	8	0
Students	15	3	0
Parents	14	4	0
Community Groups	15	3	0

* Two responses from Private School Principals and so not applicable.

The views of the principals concerning their level of difficulty in working with various groups are similar to those of the superintendents. They seemed to have more difficulty with teachers and custodians than with other groups, especially secretaries, students and community groups. Three principals suggested unions as providing some difficulty.

When asked to designate the most troublesome group, one third identified teachers, either individually or collectively. Two others mentioned

teacher unions. Other groups identified were parents, central administrators, and school committees.

Sources of Support

The superintendents were asked to identify the person (by title) or group that is their strongest source of support. About half named the school committee and the other half named their "colleagues in the central office" or other administrators, such as "principals".

In naming their greatest source of difficulty, about half of the superintendents named teachers or unions or principals.

Among the principals, "other administrators", "other principals", or the "superintendent" were seen as the greatest source of support for many. A few identified "teachers" and an equal number identified "parents" or the "community" as being particularly supportive.

Professional Development

Interviewees were asked to identify areas of their work important to them for professional development. Almost all of the responses of the superintendents focused on management issues as opposed to leadership issues. They identified time management, contract negotiations and contract management, budgeting, legal matters, policy development and planning, and curriculum and program development as areas that are important for superintendents. These were also identified as priority areas.

The responses of the superintendents concerning professional development was somewhat surprising since many expressed an interest in operational matters. Previous research concerning this question suggested that superintendents tend to be more interested in leadership issues than management issues. (See Robert Maher NAASP *Bulletin* May 1988; G. Cawelti *Educational Leadership* November 1986.) In those same studies,

however, principals were found to be more interested in management issues than in leadership and theoretical issues. That preference was also found in this study.

When asked what is the best or most effective format for professional development, almost all superintendents would like short but intensive seminars. Several said they need to "get away" to examine issues in depth. They acknowledged the problem of balancing the job demands on their time with the need to focus on both the theoretical and practical applications inherent in the study of problems. Most identified "a couple of days away", "weekend retreat", "half day conferences", "short, intensive overnighters or weekenders", "one or two full day seminars", as the most productive forms of professional development.

Principals felt that their positions required considerable attention to problems of school management; personnel problems, particularly staff supervision, evaluation, and development; curriculum development; public relations. Concerning the format for professional development, several mentioned assessment programs as being particularly promising. Others felt that effective development could not occur in short sessions and that "one or two day" sessions would be required or "afternoon and evening sessions would be best". Others identified the seminar approach wherein each participant would bring something to the discussion. "It is important for each to get into the literature and examine the theoretical and practical application." Others mentioned visits to other programs to "see them in action".

Special Education

A set of questions about special education was developed for the interviews by the Rhode Island Department of Education in order to assist the Department in its formulation of future policy. Also, it was determined that the needs of the special education community and the goals of more effective

school administrators would be better served by the attempt to gather more information about this area.

Superintendents were asked to comment on how they see their role in the special education process. Most saw their role as one of "mediator" or "monitor". As a group, they did not identify an active role for themselves. One claimed he had "no role at all". Another superintendent characterized the role as "frustrating". In his judgment, the regulations were "too explicit" and "removed everybody except the special education staff from the process". "We have no governance role in the process. It's a never-ending morass of heavy bureaucracy".

When asked to comment on their relationship with the special education staff and administration, most superintendents spoke favorably about both.

More than half feel satisfied with the program and personnel and said the relationship was "good". A few said the relationship was a distant one and they relied on the director to keep the central office informed.

Most of the superintendents said they didn't have a problem with the program largely due to the director's competence and/or that of the staff. Others identified problems due to "lack of resources" or variants of that response.

Concerning information/training needs, many identified two general areas: the need for mainstream teachers to be more effective in working with students who have been mainstreamed and the need for teachers to learn to write better IEP's.

Principals saw their role in the special education process as "advocate", "facilitator", "active participant", "involved". In general, they saw their role as helping teachers in the referral process and ensuring that the students were well served.

Concerning their relationship with their own special education staff, the principals characterized the relationship as a good one. They saw their special education teachers as having a difficult task which they carried out well.

They identified a number of problems with special education administration, however. One principal said he had "more problems with special education than I want to think about". Several identified the difficulty of maintaining a fair and equitable discipline policy when designated "behavior disordered" pupils were "exempt from the regular rules and regulations". There are "two sets of rules in my building and one I don't have any control over". They said they seemed to work "with a school within a school" that made them feel unvalued as principals. Some complained that the regulations demanded "too much" of their time and efforts. A number claimed that the special education director was not involved enough. He just "drops off the kids and leaves". While a number complained about the special education administration in the central office, about half also praised that same office for its "good communication", its "high competence", and its "dedicated" and "caring" personnel.

More principals felt that their faculty need more information about special education regulations, specifically the selection and identification process in special education, instructional obligations in the regular classroom, and program opportunities available. Some said their teachers need information about servicing mainstreamed pupils who have been designated as learning disabled. They need more training in "the technical language of and orientation to the nature of disability".

End Notes

References Cited

Feistritzer, C. Emily. (1988). *Profile of School Administrators in the U.S.* Washington D.C.: National Center for Education Information

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Note:

[1]Numbers of respondents reporting their highest degree are different between Tables 9 and Tables 8 and 10. Data for these tables appeared in two different places in the questionnaire; 10 respondents (9 principals and one assistant principal) omitted one of the items; 17 respondents (2 superintendents, 4 assistant superintendents, 8 principals, and 3 assistant principals) reported different levels of highest degree in the two places on the survey.

Appendix A:

Importance and Challenge Items, by administrative title

Table A.1. *Average Importance and Challenge for* ***Superintendents'*** *Roles*

Importance[1]	Challenge[1]		Role description
4.68	3.65	a.	Establishing an orderly and peaceful climate in the district
4.92	4.58	b.	Establishing high expectations for *teachers* in the district
4.76	4.27	c.	Establishing high expectations for *students* in the district
4.32	3.42	d.	Setting student goals for learning that are accepted in the district
4.48	3.35	e.	Having a system that regularly assesses the student's achievement
4.40	3.92	f.	"Running the district" so that things don't "just happen"
4.76	4.38	g.	Developing a systematic curriculum that is based on the learning goals and feedback from assessment
4.36	4.19	h.	Using political skills in support of education (public relations, communication, negotiation)
4.32	3.84	i.	Managing finances
3.88	3.31	j.	Managing facilities and materials
4.16	3.69	k.	Managing time
4.36	3.77	l.	Resolving conflicts
2.72	2.85	m.	Developing staff capacity to do paperwork
3.32	2.73	n.	Making oral presentations to groups
3.96	3.46	o.	Writing effectively (proposals, curriculum, newsletters)
4.20	3.81	p.	Using school data to improve curriculum and instruction
4.48	4.11	q.	Evaluating teachers
4.60	3.65	r.	Making important personnel decisions
4.04	3.73	s.	Providing staff development programs and activities
3.80	3.54	t.	Dealing with legal issues of the district
4.64	4.15	u.	Building a sense of unified direction among the district staff
3.84	3.50	v.	Working productively with individual schools.
4.28	3.50	w.	Deciding on important priorities for the year
4.04	3.96	x.	Obtaining resources to help achieve priorities
3.68	3.42	y.	Understanding the best way to get things done in the district
3.80	3.27	z.	Establishing systems to keep track of students, budgets, materials
4.52	4.08	aa.	Developing and articulating a clear vision for the district
4.84	4.00	bb.	Working effectively with the school committee
4.00	3.58	cc.	Working effectively with municipal officials
4.20	3.46	dd.	Keeping good relations with the media
4.28	4.20	ee.	Dealing effectively with the unions (negotiations, grievances, etc.)

[1] Ratings are on 5 point scales. For Importance, 5=Very Important; 1=Not Important. For Challenge, 5 = Very Challenging; 1=Not Challenging

Table A.2. *Average Importance and Challenge for* ***Assistant Superintendents*** *Roles*

Importance[1]	Challenge[1]		Role description
4.16	3.28	a.	Establishing an orderly and peaceful climate in the district
4.68	4.00	b.	Establishing high expectations for *teachers* in the district
4.40	3.96	c.	Establishing high expectations for *students* in the district
4.44	4.00	d.	Setting student goals for learning that are accepted in the district
4.44	3.44	e.	Having a system that regularly assesses the student's achievement
4.12	3.75	f.	"Running the district" so that things don't "just happen"
4.52	4.32	g.	Developing a systematic curriculum that is based on the learning goals and feedback from assessment
4.20	3.80	h.	Using political skills in support of education (public relations, communication, negotiation)
3.48	3.28	i.	Managing finances
3.52	3.04	j.	Managing facilities and materials
4.17	3.68	k.	Managing time
4.32	3.80	l.	Resolving conflicts
3.25	3.12	m.	Developing staff capacity to do paperwork
3.84	2.84	n.	Making oral presentations to groups
4.48	3.40	o.	Writing effectively (proposals, curriculum, newsletters)
4.44	3.96	p.	Using school data to improve curriculum and instruction
4.20	3.64	q.	Evaluating teachers
4.00	3.46	r.	Making important personnel decisions
4.40	4.12	s.	Providing staff development programs and activities
3.40	3.16	t.	Dealing with legal issues of the district
4.68	4.32	u.	Building a sense of unified direction among the district staff
4.48	3.56	v.	Working productively with individual schools.
4.24	3.44	w.	Deciding on important priorities for the year
3.92	3.52	x.	Obtaining resources to help achieve priorities
3.84	3.44	y.	Understanding the best way to get things done in the district
3.60	3.12	z.	Establishing systems to keep track of students, budgets, materials
4.62	4.33	aa.	Developing and articulating a clear vision for the district
4.72	3.92	bb.	Working effectively with the school committee
3.96	3.62	cc.	Working effectively with municipal officials
4.08	3.46	dd.	Keeping good relations with the media
4.36	4.24	ee.	Dealing effectively with the unions (negotiations, grievances, etc.)

[1] Ratings are on 5 point scales. For importance, 5=Very Important; 1=Not Important. For Challenge, 5 = Very Challenging; 1=Not Challenging

Table A.3. *Average Importance and Challenge for* ***Principals*** *Roles*

Importance[1]	Challenge[1]		Role description
4.84	3.61	a.	Establishing an orderly and peaceful climate in the district
4.82	4.30	b.	Establishing high expectations for *teachers* in the district
4.84	4.25	c.	Establishing high expectations for *students* in the district
4.48	3.86	d.	Setting student goals for learning that are accepted in the district
4.34	3.58	e.	Having a system that regularly assesses the student's achievement
4.27	3.58	f.	"Running the school" so that things don't "just happen"
4.46	4.07	g.	Developing a systematic curriculum that is based on the learning goals and feedback from assessment
3.70	3.37	h.	Using political skills in support of education (public relations, communication, negotiation)
3.43	2.90	i.	Managing finances
3.52	2.79	j.	Managing facilities and materials
4.38	3.90	k.	Managing time
4.13	3.62	l.	Resolving conflicts
2.75	2.54	m.	Developing staff capacity to do paperwork
3.37	2.81	n.	Making oral presentations to groups
3.88	3.24	o.	Writing effectively (proposals, curriculum, newsletters)
4.21	3.79	p.	Using school data to improve curriculum and instruction
4.45	4.02	q.	Evaluating teachers
4.18	3.61	r.	Making important personnel decisions
4.10	3.74	s.	Providing staff development programs and activities
3.39	2.88	t.	Dealing with legal issues of the district
4.57	4.12	u.	Building a sense of unified direction among the district staff
3.72	3.07	v.	Working productively with individual schools.
4.18	3.45	w.	Deciding on important priorities for the year
4.19	3.85	x.	Obtaining resources to help achieve priorities
3.83	3.14	y.	Understanding the best way to get things done in the district
3.64	3.03	z.	Establishing systems to keep track of students, budgets, materials
4.54	4.01	aa.	Developing and articulating a clear vision for the school

[1] Ratings are on 5 point scales. For importance, 5=Very Important; 1=Not Important. For Challenge, 5 = Very Challenging; 1=Not Challenging

Table A.4. *Average Importance and Challenge for **Assistant Principals'** Roles*

Importance[1]	Challenge[1]		Role description
4.95	4.05	a.	Establishing an orderly and peaceful climate in the district
4.68	4.30	b.	Establishing high expectations for *teachers* in the district
4.82	4.41	c.	Establishing high expectations for *students* in the district
4.12	3.62	d.	Setting student goals for learning that are accepted in the district
4.07	3.60	e.	Having a system that regularly assesses the student's achievement
4.50	3.96	f.	"Running the school" so that things don't "just happen"
4.04	3.66	g.	Developing a systematic curriculum that is based on the learning goals and feedback from assessment
3.73	3.24	h.	Using political skills in support of education (public relations, communication, negotiation)
3.30	3.04	i.	Managing finances
3.96	3.25	j.	Managing facilities and materials
4.25	4.04	k.	Managing time
4.59	4.04	l.	Resolving conflicts
3.00	2.82	m.	Developing staff capacity to do paperwork
3.36	2.75	n.	Making oral presentations to groups
3.93	3.16	o.	Writing effectively (proposals, curriculum, newsletters)
3.81	3.49	p.	Using school data to improve curriculum and instruction
4.52	3.95	q.	Evaluating teachers
4.09	3.40	r.	Making important personnel decisions
3.37	3.27	s.	Providing staff development programs and activities
3.76	3.07	t.	Dealing with legal issues of the district
4.30	4.09	u.	Building a sense of unified direction among the district staff
3.57	3.05	v.	Working productively with individual schools.
3.80	3.11	w.	Deciding on important priorities for the year
3.67	3.39	x.	Obtaining resources to help achieve priorities
4.05	3.21	y.	Understanding the best way to get things done in the district
4.00	3.29	z.	Establishing systems to keep track of students, budgets, materials
4.19	3.76	aa.	Developing and articulating a clear vision for the school

[1] Ratings are on 5 point scales. For importance, 5=Very Important; 1=Not Important. For Challenge, 5 = Very Challenging; 1=Not Challenging